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CIA broadens contacts with campuses in US

By Richard Higgins
Globe Staff

Almost a decade after its ties to academe were severely strained by disclosures of secretly funded research and abuses in covert operations, the Central Intelligence Agency is aggressively rebuilding its bridges to US campuses, according to present and former CIA officials and academics.

The agency acknowledges that using the academic community to bolster the CIA's analyses of world economic and political events is a key goal of its deputy director for intelligence, Robert Gates.

This spring, George Lauder, the chief CIA spokesman, called "the dramatic expansion of [the CIA's] contacts with academics" and independent think tanks "a major CIA initiative in recent years."

In a letter published in Foreign Policy, Lauder wrote that in 1984 "1,200 [CIA] analysts attended nearly 500 conferences on substantive issues, many of them sponsored by universities . . . Many of the agency's substantive papers are now reviewed by academics." The agency, Lauder added, is also "seeking out scholars with a different point of view than the CIA's."

The CIA will not reveal the extent of its contracts with scholars or academic institutions, but it does acknowledge its renewed interest in academe.

"CIA analysis is enhanced by contact with the academic community," the agency said in a statement in response to a Globe inquiry, "and the CIA has expanded those contacts on issues of interest to the agency and to national security."

The CIA funds numerous scholarly conferences in the United States and around the world each year on subjects ranging from the Philippines to Islamic fundamentalism to nuclear proliferation. It is increasingly inviting academics to its own conferences and to review CIA intelligence analyses.

Last week, for example, scholars from Harvard and the Universities of Maryland and California attended an unclassified CIA conference in Washington on European security, according a participant.

Sponsors, funds research

The CIA sponsors research at some institutions: Harvard and Brown universities are among those with current contracts; in the last two years it has sponsored research at Villanova, Rutgers, Texas A&M and the University of Illinois. It provides funds to scholars writing books, doing field work abroad and working as consultants to the agency. Funding for other academic enterprises are often channeled through third parties, including foundations, publishers and other government agencies.

Patti Volz, a CIA spokeswoman, declined to specify the number of academic consultants working for the CIA. However, former agency officials, who declined to be identified, and scholars familiar with the CIA estimate that about 150 professors currently serve as consultants and read drafts of CIA analyses.

The new ties come almost 10 years after the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence revealed that the agency had secretly arranged for publication of hundreds of books and that scores of professors had worked for the CIA without informing their universities. Because of that and other CIA abuses, many academics shunned contact with the agency for years.

Today, however, the picture has changed.

"Many more people seem to feel that there's nothing wrong from a moral or professional point of view with consulting or doing particular services, including research, for the CIA," said professor John Womack, a former chairman of Harvard's history department. "There was a time when academics felt that wasn't a good idea, but that seems to be subsiding."

John Shattuck, vice president for public affairs at Harvard University, said he was aware of only one CIA contract that had been cleared through Harvard's Office of Sponsored Research, as required by university policy, a $7,500 grant to a professor investigating new information technology.

But he said he believes there has been a trend toward more ties between the agency and professors.

Trend toward involvement

"There is certainly not less money flowing in," he said. "I think the CIA has been trying to find an academic home all over the place, and the trend has certainly been toward further involvement." Other academics agree.

CIA grants for unclassified research, like other federal contracts, cannot be concealed by law. About a dozen universities, furthermore, have their own guidelines to ensure that CIA funding does not abridge academic freedom.

When professors receive CIA funds as "individual contractors," however, it is generally up to them to report it to their superiors. For that reason, some university officials say they can't rule out that some professors work part-time for the CIA without their knowledge.

John M. Deutch, the provost of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said MIT now has no CIA contracts for sponsored research. Any such grant would have to pass through the university administration, he said.

However, Deutch added, "I'm

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